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PURPOSE AND METHODS OF A HOME SERVICE SECTION

BY MARY WILLCOX GLENN,

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The service of the Red Cross is typified in one of the most popular posters of the second war fund drive by the tense figure of a woman who with outstretched arms urges her claim that the marching forces against whose shadowy outline she is silhouetted be not forgotten. What she, trained for a specific work, can give the wounded needs no defining. Neither does the service represented by the "Greatest Mother in the World," another poster of universal appeal. The child, a victim of war's ravages, must be tenderly, skillfully treated. An authentic portrayal of bodily anguish quickly brings the means of redress. The public knows that what the nurse and doctor have to offer is something more than money in itself can buy. Emphasis on the need of funds will not lessen the recognition of the important rôle the nurse and diagnostician will have to play.

But the purpose and methods of home service cannot so readily be depicted. A popular pictorial appeal, one which stimulated the imagination to conceive of threatened family life as steadied by simple direct means, would, in itself, be a denial of what home service aims to be. The aim is to individualize the family, to treat each as unique, never to make the assumption that money in itself is necessarily a solvent of difficulties. The public's tendency is to assert in one breath that home service is no charity, and to demand in the next that it be chiefly an almoner of funds. The property inherent in money does not suffer change because the name of a process of distribution is arbitrarily altered. An office characterized as a place where money may easily be obtained because the applicant has a right to it, and in which, because of the "right," few questions are asked, will tend to become an agency for the financial relief of the least resourceful families in a community. It will, moreover, be unlikely to relieve any family continuously, for the habit of the dispenser of funds will be to alternate quickly between facile credulity and sharp distrust. The honest intention to give money as a right carries with it a sense of the community's right to have money conscientiously used. The corollary of the thoughtless, emotional

giving of money is distrust of the subject of the aid. An office safeguarded against suspicion of laxity or parsimony because in it the right of the individual to receive liberal treatment, of the community to have its money conserved as a trust, are each acknowledged and each secured through trained thinking, will be one to which the sensitive, the independent in spirit, will be willing to go. Such an office will be blessed if it bear steadily in mind the fact that the great lovers of humanity have been able spontaneously, helpfully, to give goods to their fellowmen, because of their unfailing intuition that the immaterial gift of their spirit transcended the material in value.

Financial relief, solicitude for family health, an immediate lessening of physical or mental suffering, are incidental to home service. A consideration of family life which envisages the future while provision is made for the present, is basic. The morale of the fighting man is kept in mind, a duty of the patriotic home service worker being to help maintain army morale by assurance given that family life is safeguarded. There is, however, a deeper claim. The service is a trust. The trust is to deliver to the returning soldier not the fabric of the home he left, but a home which potentially, however housed, will *carry on*, refined by common sacrifice. If he fail to return, if he return broken in mind and body, the demand of the trust is that there may abide in his home a quality which will perpetuate its value. If he return a stranger to his old responsibilities, his one-time affections, the trust is to try to revivify the attributes lost in the big demoralization of war. Any tale of service rendered fails to give an impression of the fine shades of difference in treatment which should characterize any sound family case work. Some instances taken from the records of our section may, however, suggest variety.

An instance of physical care, reminiscent of the "Greatest Mother in the World," is after care for a sergeant's little daughter, who suffered from infantile paralysis. Helpless when she left the hospital, the doctor promised ultimate recovery if she were given careful oversight and enabled to get regular exercise. Providing a tricycle was the means used on the physician's advice.

An ambitious boy given an opportunity to study law, a capable girl lessons in typewriting, are instances of educational opportunities. An artificial leg for a soldier's father to enable him to work

and stop street begging, a position as stewardess for a woman so that she might work her way back to England and be near her British husband fighting in France, make promise of better security of the home through industrial openings. A second mortgage secured on a piece of real estate, a canceled contract which overtaxed a family's resources, a readjustment of expenditure so that a household might manage on a reduced income without lowering any essential of the standard of living;—each is an instance of economic adjustment.

Correspondence with police authorities in Ireland, learning thereby the regimental number of a man who deserted his wife and enlisted in the British army, and securing subsequently an allotment of his pay; re-instating in the navy a boy whose family in Montana were anxious about his status because they knew he had tried to desert from the United States navy and enlist in the Canadian army, and getting his officer's promise that he would keep an interested eye on him; protecting a wayward girl whose brother in the service was apprehensive about her conduct, are all instances of intervention in behalf of a better morality. A widower, whose child by his request was withdrawn from an institution for fear parental control would be forfeited, and was placed in a boarding-house where the father might visit his boy at will and advise care shows one way in which family solidarity may be served.

An instance which suggests that home service may be international in scope and may strike down to racial roots, is illustrated by the request of a Jewish father in the British army to have his little daughter taken from a public institution in New York state and boarded in a private family. A good home was found through a Zionist society. The family boarding the child promised, in fulfilment of the father's wish, to take her later to join her grandparents in Palestine. Securing care in a neurological hospital for a girl subject to mental aberrations, placing a distraught mother under observation in a psychopathic ward, validating the compensation claim of a woman whose husband became insane in the line of naval duty prove the need of protecting the interests of the mentally unbalanced.

Any statement of treatment recently planned and executed fails to prove that desired results, even if attained, will be held. Quotations from letters received by members of our staff will, however, give positive proof of the regard in which we are held by some of

the men and their families. They are witness to the influence the section begins to exert.

One man writes that his family feels neglected because the visitor had not called recently; another that he turns to the Red Cross for "advice, help and comfort." A sergeant says, "I have heard from home and the news which I got cheered me a great deal. . . . It is a great consolation to me to see how you and the Red Cross have helped them (his mother and his wife) out." A private writes that he had not forgotten the kindness shown his wife and adds, "I would like for you to visit her as often as you can spare the time, as I left her in a bad condition and I certainly feel sorry for her." "It has lifted a great weight from my mind to know that they have someone to give them the proper care while I am absent from home," writes a soldier from a southern cantonment. From another southern cantonment comes a letter in which the private says, "Glad that you will think and pray for me. . . . I wish that you will look into my family and take care of them while my brother and I are away. . . . I will always write to you and think of you as a true friend of the family." And from still another cantonment, "I received a letter from home stating how a very nice woman representing your people was home and that she encouraged my mother very much."

A wealth of family affection breathes from the simple words, "Your favorable report of the courage of R— and S— (two small sisters) during their trying time with adenoids is also a source of much pleasure to me. Tell them I am proud of them for being so brave." And in the extract from the letter of another man, "I guess you all know how a soldier feels when the only sister that he has is sick and don't hear from her for some time." A soldier "at sea en route to somewhere in France" wrote: "Miss —— has helped me to be more efficient than I thought I'd be when I left my family and answered the call." After speaking in some detail of what the home service visitor had meant to his family, he continued: "that alone is enough to spur one on to use the best that is in him." The place of home service in the great scheme of patriotic duty fulfilled is recognized by the aviator who wrote: "I must say that you are certainly doing your bit."

The testimony of two women may be added to this partial exhibit of how the families under care react to the thought given to

their homes. "My husband says he can go away with a much lighter heart now that he knows his little girl is in the hands of two good women like you both," writes one, and the other, a trained nurse whose husband was in a training camp says, "I want to thank you for all the time and trouble you had to take to attend to the matter for me. . . . I know when you read this that you will say that I should give the Red Cross the full measure of my gratitude for the wonderful help they have given me in my trouble. I do, but I realize very keenly that if you were not gifted with such a wonderful insight into human nature and a great fund of sympathy, all the good would have been taken out of all visits and help given."

There is a tender little missive from which one is tempted to quote. It was written by a little girl who had been sent in the spring to the country for a needed change. "I did not forget about the doll you send me. I was afraid to take it along. I fell in love with that sweetheart doll," she wrote; and in reading one felt in her response to the gift which had been inspired by affection a something that was creative in quality.

Two gifts came to the office which also had the power to stir the imagination. One was some stalks of cotton grown in Georgia and sent by a soldier; the other a medal cast in Germany in 1914 in anticipation of the German army's triumphal entrance into Paris, and brought by a sailor who had bought the medal in Birgenhead as a souvenir,—the typical product of the south offered in token of appreciation of what a northern office was doing for boys in the service of the United States, and the corroboration of Germany's sinister design given in recognition of Red Cross service by one of the men America had sent to annihilate the Central Powers' gross assumption.

A sailor appealed in behalf of his three children under five. He wanted home service to supervise their care and act as custodian of the money he would appropriate for board and other necessities. He had always tended them at night, and supervised their feeding. His wife, a young actress, came later to look us over. Her method of investigation being to trust to her intuition, her decision was quickly made to acquiesce heartily in the father's plans. "You'll do," she said, as she looked critically at the visitor. To include her in the effort made in behalf of the family group became our problem.

A widow's only son enlisted, and she could not bear the cost of the sacrifice. She persuaded him to secure a first discharge, and later when he had been drafted, a second. But he grieved over his failure to be in the service, and she gave final consent to his enlisting a second time. A home service visitor learned to know her intimately during these periods of devastating decision, and in winning her affection got a heartening impression of the moral courage which underlay the ultimate decision. This act of heroism, whose distinguished service cross must be stamped on the heart, not worn on the breast, was cited by the visitor in speaking before a small country audience. After the meeting a woman present came forward to say that she had two sons. She had consented to the going of one but had held the other. Now she would restrain him no longer.

The conviction grows, as I read letters such as those from which I quote, and as I listen to what the visitors say about their contacts with families, that men in the service want assurance that the Red Cross will protect their homes through steadying family morale, giving the right chance to the child, interpreting to the woman the shifting value of coin and custom. The men who fight know that the federal allotments and allowances will in the main cover essential needs, but that financial sacrifice is the common demand. The place of Red Cross relief funds in a scheme of family protection will be rightly conceived by those who shrink neither from making or suggesting sacrifice, but who consider in each case how far the standard of comfort may be altered without jeopardizing the essentials of a right standard of living.

When the New York and Bronx County Chapters established a Home Service Section late in March, 1917, there was no body of detached trained case workers. The established social agencies in the community had not only absorbed such workers as were trained but were training new recruits to augment their own staffs. The newly organized section manned its office with a worker whose experience of many years had been in a district of the New York Charity Organization Society, supplemented by service under the Red Cross in two periods when the local civilian relief committee was called on to provide relief and rehabilitation following on a disaster. Around the worker gathered a rapidly growing body of volunteers whose training came in large measure through action.

The readiness of the School of Philanthropy to give a lecture course, of the districts of the Charity Organization Society to provide practical experience, of women eager to train for patriotic service, meant that when families began in large numbers to apply to the office there was a staff eager, and comparatively prepared, to meet their needs. The grip of the work itself holds steady those who come under its human influence, draws many in to give larger portions of time than was contemplated, develops an ability to stand the physical and emotional strain involved, quickens the intelligence to finer appreciation of human variations and reactions. A learning through doing, when the thing to do is to meet human need, the will to do a response to a patriotic impulse, can bring illuminating results. But the learning how to do the thing aright depends on someone being at hand to furnish clues and inculcate principles of action.

How to provide adequate supervision has become a difficult problem to meet not only by the New York and Bronx County Chapters, but by the chapters throughout the country. The two needs have run side by side: to increase the force of field visitors, and to add to the staff of supervisors. The advertising of courses of study, appeals made in colleges and churches, frequent calls on war enrollment bureaus, urging friend to enlist friend, have been tried simultaneously, repeatedly. The hand-picked method has proved the most successful in securing quality, but too slow in results to be used alone. There is the competition with other war activities to meet, and the rule not to cripple the force, professional or non-professional, of the continuing community agencies to observe. But there undoubtedly is sufficient energy to meet the requirements of each agency if those responsible for building staffs learn how to voice their appeal so that it reaches the imagination and satisfies the intelligence of women who have a margin of time.

In beginning a second winter of work when our section can count on the services of a group of supervisors and assistants, of visitors and office workers which on October first will doubtless number nearer four than five hundred, we shall be prepared to assume responsibility for conducting continuous general chapter courses and special courses for selected groups. This past season, two of our chapter courses have been given by a member of our staff. One course, arranged by us, was given at the University Settlement to

a small group of neighborhood young women. One of this number is now able to assume responsibility for running the home service information center, opened at the settlement. Plans are being made to repeat this particular experiment in another part of the city next winter. A course offered by the School of Sociology of Fordham University will be conducted by members of our staff, the practice work given under our supervision.

Those responsible for supervision have turned to the School of Philanthropy for inspiration. The director of the school has agreed to conduct a class of twenty-five members of the home service staff, who will bring into the class room current case problems, there to get a deepened appreciation of guiding principles and to learn how to evaluate the fresh reactions families are making to the new conditions. Out from the class room the supervisory force should carry a stream of influence which should vitally affect the community's attitude towards family life, after as well as during the war.

The readiness with which the various social groups work for and with the Red Cross in behalf of soldiers' and sailors' families makes unified effort unprecedentedly easy. Newly organized groups such as the regimental units, the Jewish Welfare Board, and the National Catholic War Council are not only ready but eager to use and be used by home service. This spirit of trust imposes a serious obligation. The field is clear of obstruction, the sole hindrance to satisfying achievement lies in the staff's immaturity; but the staff has the will to use its many sided opportunity.

America more fully reveals herself to those who through home service reach out to protect her interests, who, purged of detachment, become at one with her peoples of many races and different creeds, who, as part of her fighting forces, battle for the ideal which lies in the treasury of her homes. The service is uneven, the effort crude, but it has the quality of youth which holds it on tiptoe. Expectancy, in fact, is the distinctive note. The attitude of alertness gives the force a resilience which carries it over periods of emergent demand. The strain of answering the call to help an unanticipatedly large number of families to carry their burdens could be borne with equanimity only if there were love for one's God, one's country, and one's fellows; faith in the power of one's fellow-man to respond to one's effort; hope in what home service will bring to the child.

Charles Peguy, one of the finest spirits the war has disembodied, wrote:

“Mais, ma petite esperance
Est celle qui tous les matins
Nous donne le bonjour.”

What our section strives to hold is the power to face each day's task with a gallant, a buoyant salutation.

INFORMATION SERVICE OF THE RED CROSS

BY CLARENCE KING,

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Giving information to families of soldiers and sailors is as much a part of home service as giving them aid when sick or in want. This information service constitutes a prominent part of the work of the home service section of each chapter of the Red Cross. Relatives of enlisted men desire information of many kinds. There is hardly a family from which a man has gone to camp or to the front which sooner or later does not feel the need of prompt and accurate information such as the Red Cross is equipped to furnish. Home service sections are advising how mail should be addressed to soldiers and sailors; how information may be obtained of those sick, wounded, captured or missing; what the War Risk Insurance Law means, and how to take advantage of its provisions.

Each home service section has in this work a two-fold opportunity: first, it can save untold anxiety and suffering. Sympathetic, prompt and accurate information, quieting fears, relieving anxiety and encouraging self-help serves materially to maintain the comfort and health of these families who have spared their breadwinners and protectors to the service of their country, and thereby also helps to sustain the morale of the fighting men themselves. Second, it can give such information, which is the most natural means to establish acquaintance and confidence between the home service worker and the family, and thus to discover opportunities for further service.